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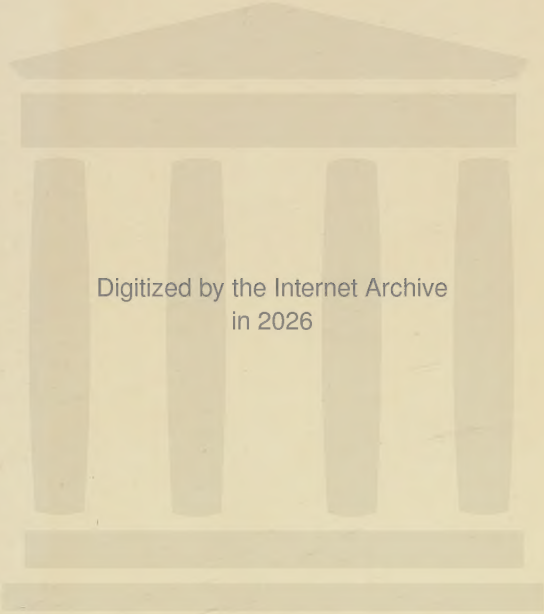

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

BY

JOSEPH H. CHOATE

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AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

EDINBURGH PHILOSOPHICAL INSTITUTION

NOVEMBER THE THIRTEENTH

NINETEEN HUNDRED

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

When you asked me to deliver the Inaugural Address on this occasion, I recognized that I owed this compliment to the fact that I was the official representative of America — and in selecting a subject I ventured to think that I might interest you for an hour in a brief study in popular government, as illustrated by the life of the most American of all Americans. I therefore offer no apology for asking your attention to Abraham Lincoln — to his unique character and the part he bore in two important achievements of modern history: the preservation of the integrity of the American Union and the emancipation of the colored race.

During his brief term of power he was probably the object of more abuse, vilification, and ridicule than any other man in the world; but when he fell by the hand of an assassin, at the very moment of his stupendous victory, all the nations of the earth vied with one another in paying homage to his character; and the thirty-five years that have since elapsed have established his place in history as one of the great benefactors not of his own country alone, but of the human race.

One of many noble utterances upon the occasion of his death was that in which "Punch" made its magnanimous recantation of the spirit with which it had pursued him: —

"Beside this corpse that bears for winding sheet
The stars and stripes he lived to rear anew,
Between the mourners at his head and feet,
Say, scurrile jester, is there room for you?

. . . . . .

"Yes, he had lived to shame me from my sneer,
To lame my pencil, and confute my pen —
To make me own this hind — of princes peer,
This rail-splitter — a true born king of men."

Fiction can furnish no match for the romance of his life, and biography will be searched in vain for such startling vicissitudes of fortune, so great power and glory won out of such humble beginnings and adverse circumstances.

Doubtless you are all familiar with the salient points of his extraordinary career. In the zenith of his fame he was the wise, patient, courageous, successful ruler of men; exercising more power than any monarch of his time, not for himself, but for the good of the people who had placed it in his hands; commander-in-chief of a vast military power, which waged with ultimate success the greatest war of the century; the triumphant champion of popular government, the deliverer of four millions of his fellow men from bondage; honored by mankind as Statesman, President, and Liberator.

Let us glance now at the first half of the brief life, of which this was the glorious and happy consummation. Nothing could be more squalid and miserable than the home in which Abraham Lincoln was born — a one-roomed cabin without floor or window in what was then the wilderness of Kentucky, in the heart of that frontier life which swiftly moved westward from the Alleghanies to the Mississippi, always in advance of schools and churches, of books and money, of railroads and newspapers, of all things which are generally regarded as the comforts and even necessaries of life. His father, igno-

rant, needy, and thriftless, content if he could keep soul and body together for himself and his family, was ever seeking, without success, to better his unhappy condition by moving on from one such scene of dreary desolation to another. The rude society which surrounded them was not much better. The struggle for existence was hard, and absorbed all their energies. They were fighting the forest, the wild beast, and the retreating savage. From the time when he could barely handle tools until he attained his majority, Lincoln's life was that of a simple farm laborer, poorly clad, housed, and fed, at work either on his father's wretched farm or hired out to neighboring farmers. But in spite, or perhaps by means, of this rude environment, he grew to be a stalwart giant, reaching six feet four at nineteen, and fabulous stories are told of his feats of strength. With the growth of this mighty frame began that strange education which in his ripening years was to qualify him for the great destiny that awaited him, and the development of those mental faculties and moral endowments which, by the time he reached middle life, were to make him the sagacious, patient, and triumphant leader of a great nation in the crisis of its fate. His whole schooling, obtained during such odd times as could be spared from grinding labor, did not amount in all to as much as one year, and the quality of the teaching was of the lowest possible grade, including only the elements of reading, writing, and ciphering. But out of these simple elements, when rightly used by the right man, education is achieved; and Lincoln knew how to use them. As so often happens, he seemed to take warning from his father's unfortunate example. Untiring industry, an insatiable thirst for knowledge, and an evergrowing desire to rise above his surroundings, were early manifestations of his character.

Books were almost unknown in that community, but the Bible was in every house, and somehow or other "Pilgrim's Progress," "Æsop's Fables," a "History of the United States," and a "Life of Washington" fell into his hands. He trudged on foot many miles through the wilderness to borrow an English Grammar, and is said to have devoured greedily the contents of the Statutes of Indiana that fell in his way. These few volumes he read and re-read — and his power of assimilation was great. To be shut in with a few books and to master them thoroughly sometimes does more for the development of character than freedom to range at large, in a cursory and indiscriminate way, through wide domains of literature. This youth's mind, at any rate, was thoroughly saturated with Biblical knowledge and Biblical language, which, in after life, he used with great readiness and effect. But it was the constant use of the little knowledge which he had that developed and exercised his mental powers. After the hard day's work was done, while others slept, he toiled on, always reading or writing. From an early age he did his own thinking and made up his own mind — invaluable traits in the future President. Paper was such a scarce commodity that, by the evening firelight, he would write and cipher on the back of a wooden shovel, and then shave it off to make room for more. By and by, as he approached manhood, he began speaking in the rude gatherings of the neighborhood, and so laid the foundation of that art of persuading his fellow men which was one rich result of his education, and one great secret of his subsequent success.

Accustomed as we are in these days of steam and telegraphs to have every intelligent boy survey the whole world each morning before breakfast, and inform

himself as to what is going on in every nation, it is hardly possible to conceive how benighted and isolated was the condition of the community at Pigeon Creek in Indiana, of which the family of Lincoln's father formed a part, or how eagerly an ambitious and high-spirited boy, such as he, must have yearned to escape. The first glimpse that he ever got of any world beyond the narrow confines of his home was in 1828, at the age of nineteen, when a neighbor employed him to accompany his son down the river to New Orleans to dispose of a flat-boat of produce — a commission which he discharged with great success.

Shortly after his return from this his first excursion into the outer world, his father, tired of failure in Indiana, packed his family and all his worldly goods into a single wagon drawn by two yoke of oxen, and after a fourteen days' tramp through the wilderness, pitched his camp once more in Illinois. Here Abraham, having come of age and being now his own master, rendered the last service of his minority by ploughing the fifteen-acre lot and splitting from the tall walnut trees of the primeval forest enough rails to surround the little clearing with a fence. Such was the meagre outfit of this coming leader of men, at the age when the future British Prime Minister or statesman emerges from the university as a double first or senior wrangler, with every advantage that high training and broad culture and association with the wisest and the best of men and women can give, and enters upon some form of public service on the road to usefulness and honor, the University course being only the first stage of the public training. So Lincoln, at twenty-one, had just begun his preparation for the public life to which he soon began to aspire. For some years yet he must continue to earn his daily

bread by the sweat of his brow, having absolutely no means, no home, no friend to consult. More farm work as a hired hand, a clerkship in a village store, the running of a mill, another trip to New Orleans on a flat-boat of his own contriving, a pilot's berth on the river — these were the means by which he subsisted until, in the summer of 1832, when he was twenty-three years of age, an event occurred which gave him public recognition.

The Black Hawk War broke out, and the Governor of Illinois calling for volunteers to repel the band of savages whose leader bore that name, Lincoln enlisted and was elected captain by his comrades, among whom he had already established his supremacy by signal feats of strength and more than one successful single combat. During the brief hostilities he was engaged in no battle and won no military glory, but his local leadership was established. The same year he offered himself as a candidate for the Legislature of Illinois, but failed at the polls. Yet his vast popularity with those who knew him was manifest. The district consisted of several counties, but the unanimous vote of the people of his own county was for Lincoln. Another unsuccessful attempt at store-keeping was followed by better luck at surveying, until his horse and instruments were levied upon under execution for the debts of his business adventure.

I have been thus detailed in sketching his early years because upon these strange foundations the structure of his great fame and service was built. In the place of a school and university training fortune substituted these trials, hardships, and struggles as a preparation for the great work which he had to do. It turned out to be exactly what the emergency required. Ten years instead

at the public school and the university certainly never could have fitted this man for the unique work which was to be thrown upon him. Some other Moses would have had to lead us to our Jordan, to the sight of our promised land of liberty.

At the age of twenty-five he became a member of the Legislature of Illinois, and so continued for eight years, and, in the meantime, qualified himself by reading such law books as he could borrow at random — for he was too poor to buy any — to be called to the Bar. For his second quarter of a century — during which a single term in Congress introduced him into the arena of national questions — he gave himself up to law and politics. In spite of his soaring ambition, his two years in Congress gave him no premonition of the great destiny that awaited him, and at its close, in 1849, we find him an unsuccessful applicant to the President for appointment as Commissioner of the General Land Office — a purely administrative Bureau; a fortunate escape for himself and for his country. Year by year his knowledge and power, his experience and reputation extended, and his mental faculties seemed to grow by what they fed on. His power of persuasion, which had always been marked, was developed to an extraordinary degree, now that he became engaged in congenial questions and subjects. Little by little he rose to prominence at the Bar, and became the most effective public speaker in the West. Not that he possessed any of the graces of the orator; but his logic was invincible, and his clearness and force of statement impressed upon his hearers the convictions of his honest mind, while his broad sympathies and sparkling and genial humor made him a universal favorite as far and as fast as his acquaintance extended.

These twenty years that elapsed from the time of his establishment as a lawyer and legislator in Springfield, the new capital of Illinois, furnished a fitting theatre for the development and display of his great faculties, and, with his new and enlarged opportunities, he obviously grew in mental stature in this second period of his career, as if to compensate for the absolute lack of advantages under which he had suffered in youth. As his powers enlarged, his reputation extended, for he was always before the people, felt a warm sympathy with all that concerned them, took a zealous part in the discussion of every public question, and made his personal influence ever more widely and deeply felt.

My brethren of the legal profession will naturally ask me, how could this rough backwoodsman, whose youth had been spent in the forest or on the farm and the flat-boat, without culture or training, education or study, by the random reading, on the wing, of a few miscellaneous law books, become a learned and accomplished lawyer? Well, he never did. He never would have earned his salt as a Writer for the Signet, nor have won a place as advocate in the Court of Session, where the technique of the profession has reached its highest perfection, and centuries of learning and precedent are involved in the equipment of a lawyer. Dr. Holmes, when asked by an anxious young mother, "When should the education of a child begin?" replied, "Madam, at least two centuries before it is born!" and so I am sure it is with the Scots lawyer.

But not so in Illinois in 1840. Between 1830 and 1880 its population increased twenty-fold, and when Lincoln began practising law in Springfield in 1837, life in Illinois was very crude and simple, and so were the courts and the administration of justice. Books and libraries

were scarce. But the people loved justice, upheld the law, and followed the courts, and soon found their favorites among the advocates. The fundamental principles of the common law, as set forth by Blackstone and Chitty, were not so difficult to acquire; and brains, common sense, force of character, tenacity of purpose, ready wit and power of speech did the rest, and supplied all the deficiencies of learning.

The lawsuits of those days were extremely simple, and the principles of natural justice were mainly relied on to dispose of them at the Bar and on the Bench, without resort to technical learning. Railroads, corporations absorbing the chief business of the community, combined and inherited wealth, with all the subtle and intricate questions they breed, had not yet come in — and so the professional agents and the equipment which they require were not needed. But there were many highly educated and powerful men at the Bar of Illinois, even in those early days, whom the spirit of enterprise had carried there in search of fame and fortune. It was by constant contact and conflict with these that Lincoln acquired professional strength and skill. Every community and every age creates its own Bar, entirely adequate for its present uses and necessities. So in Illinois, as the population and wealth of the State kept on doubling and quadrupling, its Bar presented a growing abundance of learning and science and technical skill. The early practitioners grew with its growth and mastered the requisite knowledge. Chicago soon grew to be one of the largest and richest and certainly the most intensely active city on the continent, and if any of my professional friends here had gone there in Lincoln's later years, to try or argue a cause, or transact other business, with any idea that Edinburgh or London had a monopoly of legal learning,

science, or subtlety, they would certainly have found their mistake.

In those early days in the West, every lawyer, especially every court lawyer, was necessarily a politician, constantly engaged in the public discussion of the many questions evolved from the rapid development of town, county, State, and Federal affairs. Then and there, in this regard, public discussion supplied the place which the universal activity of the press has since monopolized, and the public speaker who, by clearness, force, earnestness, and wit, could make himself felt on the questions of the day would rapidly come to the front. In the absence of that immense variety of popular entertainments which now feed the public taste and appetite, the people found their chief amusement in frequenting the courts and public and political assemblies. In either place, he who impressed, entertained, and amused them most was the hero of the hour. They did not discriminate very carefully between the eloquence of the forum and the eloquence of the hustings. Human nature ruled in both alike, and he who was the most effective speaker in a political harangue was often retained as most likely to win in a cause to be tried or argued. And I have no doubt in this way many retainers came to Lincoln. Fees, money in any form, had no charms for him — in his eager pursuit of fame he could not afford to make money. He was ambitious to distinguish himself by some great service to mankind, and this ambition for fame and real public service left no room for avarice in his composition. However much he earned, he seems to have ended every year hardly richer than he began it, and yet as the years passed, fees came to him freely. One of £1,000 is recorded — a very large professional fee at that time, even in any part of America, the para-

dise of lawyers. I lay great stress on Lincoln's career as a lawyer — much more than his biographers do — because in America a state of things exists wholly different from that which prevails in Great Britain. The profession of the law always has been — and is to this day — the principal avenue to public life; and I am sure that his training and experience in the courts had much to do with the development of those forces of intellect and character which he soon displayed on a broader arena.

It was in political controversy, of course, that he acquired his wide reputation, and made his deep and lasting impression upon the people of what had now become the powerful State of Illinois, and upon the people of the Great West, to whom the political power and control of the United States were already surely and swiftly passing from the older Eastern States. It was this reputation and this impression and the familiar knowledge of his character which had come to them from his local leadership, that happily inspired the people of the West to present him as their candidate, and to press him upon the Republican convention of 1860 as the fit and necessary leader in the struggle for life which was before the nation.

That struggle, as you all know, arose out of the terrible question of Slavery — and I must trust to your general knowledge of the history of that question to make intelligible the attitude and leadership of Lincoln as the champion of the hosts of freedom in the final contest. Negro slavery had been firmly established in the Southern States from an early period of their history. In 1619, the year before the "Mayflower" landed our Pilgrim Fathers upon Plymouth Rock, a Dutch ship had discharged a cargo of African slaves at Jamestown

in Virginia. All through the colonial period their importation had continued. A few had found their way into the Northern States, but in none of them in sufficient numbers to constitute danger or to afford a basis for political power. At the time of the adoption of the Federal Constitution, there is no doubt that the principal members of the Convention not only condemned slavery as a moral, social, and political evil, but believed that by the suppression of the slave trade it was in the course of gradual extinction in the South, as it certainly was in the North. Washington, in his will, provided for the emancipation of his own slaves, and said to Jefferson that it "was among his first wishes to see some plan adopted by which slavery in his country might be abolished." Jefferson said, referring to the institution: "I tremble for my country when I think that God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever," — and Franklin, Adams, Hamilton, and Patrick Henry were all utterly opposed to it. But it was made the subject of a fatal compromise in the Federal Constitution, whereby its existence was recognized in the States as a basis of representation, the prohibition of the importation of slaves was postponed for twenty years, and the return of fugitive slaves provided for. But no imminent danger was apprehended from it till, by the invention of the cotton gin in 1792, cotton culture by negro labor became at once and forever the leading industry of the South, and gave a new impetus to the importation of slaves, so that in 1808, when the constitutional prohibition took effect, their numbers had vastly increased. From that time forward slavery became the basis of a great political power, and the Southern States, under all circumstances and at every opportunity, carried on a brave and unrelenting struggle for its maintenance and extension.

The conscience of the North was slow to rise against it, though bitter controversies from time to time took place. The Southern leaders threatened disunion if their demands were not complied with. To save the Union, compromise after compromise was made; but each one in the end was broken. The Missouri Compromise, made in 1820 upon the occasion of the admission of Missouri into the Union as a slave State, — whereby, in consideration of such admission, slavery was forever excluded from the Northwest Territory, — was ruthlessly repealed in 1854, by a Congress elected in the interests of the slave power, the intent being to force slavery into that vast territory which had so long been dedicated to freedom. This challenge at last aroused the slumbering conscience and passion of the North, and led to the formation of the Republican party for the avowed purpose of preventing, by constitutional methods, the further extension of slavery.

In its first campaign in 1856, though it failed to elect its candidates, it received a surprising vote and carried many of the States. No one could any longer doubt that the North had made up its mind that no threats of disunion should deter it from pressing its cherished purpose and performing its long neglected duty. From the outset, Lincoln was one of the most active and effective leaders and speakers of the new party, and the great debates between Lincoln and Douglas in 1858, as the respective champions of the restriction and extension of slavery, attracted the attention of the whole country. Lincoln's powerful arguments carried conviction everywhere. His moral nature was thoroughly aroused — his conscience was stirred to the quick. Unless slavery was wrong, nothing was wrong. Was each man, of whatever color, entitled to the fruits of his own labor, or could one

man live in idle luxury by the sweat of another's brow, whose skin was darker? He was an implicit believer in that principle of the Declaration of Independence that all men are vested with certain inalienable rights — the equal rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. On this doctrine he staked his case and carried it. We have time only for one or two sentences in which he struck the keynote of the contest:

"The real issue in this country is the eternal struggle between these two principles — right and wrong — throughout the world. They are the two principles that have stood face to face from the beginning of time, and will ever continue to struggle. The one is the common right of humanity, and the other the divine right of kings. It is the same principle in whatever shape it develops itself. It is the same spirit that says, 'You work and toil and earn bread and I 'll eat it.'"

He foresaw with unerring vision that the conflict was inevitable and irrepressible — that one or the other, the right or the wrong, freedom or slavery, must ultimately prevail and wholly prevail, throughout the country; and this was the principle that carried the war, once begun, to a finish.

One sentence of his is immortal:

"Under the operation of the policy of compromise, the slavery agitation has not only not ceased, but has constantly augmented. In my opinion it will not cease until a crisis shall have been reached and passed. 'A house divided against itself cannot stand.' I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved. I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other; either the opponents of slavery will arrest the

further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction, or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new, North as well as South."

During the entire decade from 1850 to 1860 the agitation of the slavery question was at the boiling point, and events which have become historical continually indicated the near approach of the overwhelming storm. No sooner had the Compromise Acts of 1850 resulted in a temporary peace, which everybody said must be final and perpetual, than new outbreaks came. The forcible carrying away of fugitive slaves by Federal troops from Boston agitated that ancient stronghold of freedom to its foundations. The publication of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," which truly exposed the frightful possibilities of the slave system; the reckless attempts by force and fraud to establish it in Kansas against the will of the vast majority of the settlers; the beating of Sumner in the Senate Chamber for words spoken in debate; the Dred Scott decision in the Supreme Court, which made the nation realize that the slave power had at last reached the fountain of Federal justice; and finally the execution of John Brown, for his wild raid into Virginia, to invite the slaves to rally to the standard of freedom which he unfurled: — all these events tend to illustrate and confirm Lincoln's contention that the nation could not permanently continue half slave and half free, but must become all one thing or all the other. When John Brown lay under sentence of death he declared that now he was sure that slavery must be wiped out in blood; but neither he nor his executioners dreamt that within four years a million soldiers would be marching across the country for its final extirpation, to the music of the war-song of the great conflict:

"John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave,
But his soul is marching on."

And now, at the age of fifty-one, this child of the wilderness, this farm laborer, rail-splitter, flat-boatman — this surveyor, lawyer, orator, stateman, and patriot, found himself elected by the great party which was pledged to prevent at all hazards the further extension of slavery, as the chief magistrate of the Republic, bound to carry out that purpose, to be the leader and ruler of the nation in its most trying hour.

Those who believe that there is a living Providence that overrules and conducts the affairs of nations, find in the elevation of this plain man to this extraordinary fortune and to this great duty which he so fitly discharged, a signal vindication of their faith. Perhaps to this philosophical institution the judgment of our philosopher Emerson will commend itself as a just estimate of Lincoln's historical place:

"His occupying the chair of state was a triumph of the good sense of mankind and of the public conscience. He grew according to the need; his mind mastered the problem of the day: and as the problem grew, so did his comprehension of it. In the war there was no place for holiday magistrate, nor fair weather sailor. The new pilot was hurried to the helm in a tornado. In four years — four years of battle days — his endurance, his fertility of resource, his magnanimity, were sorely tried, and never found wanting. There, by his courage, his justice, his even temper, his fertile counsel, his humanity, he stood a heroic figure in the centre of a heroic epoch. He is the true history of the American people in his time, the true representative of this continent — father of his country, the pulse of twenty millions throbbing

in his heart, the thought of their mind articulated in his tongue."

He was born great, as distinguished from those who achieve greatness or have it thrust upon them, and his inherent capacity, mental, moral, and physical, having been recognized by the educated intelligence of a free people, they happily chose him for their ruler in a day of deadly peril.

It is now forty years since I first saw and heard Abraham Lincoln, but the impression which he left on my mind is ineffaceable. After his great successes in the West he came to New York to make a political address. He appeared in every sense of the word like one of the plain people among whom he loved to be counted. At first sight there was nothing impressive or imposing about him — except that his great stature singled him out from the crowd; his clothes hung awkwardly on his giant frame, his face was of a dark pallor, without the slightest tinge of color; his seamed and rugged features bore the furrows of hardship and struggle; his deep-set eyes looked sad and anxious; his countenance in repose gave little evidence of that brain power which had raised him from the lowest to the highest station among his countrymen; as he talked to me before the meeting, he seemed ill at ease, with that sort of apprehension which a young man might feel before presenting himself to a new and strange audience, whose critical disposition he dreaded. It was a great audience, including all the noted men — all the learned and cultured — of his party in New York: editors, clergymen, statesmen, lawyers, merchants, critics. They were all very curious to hear him. His fame as a powerful speaker had preceded him, and exaggerated rumor of his wit — the worst forerunner of an orator — had reached the East. When Mr.

Bryant presented him, on the high platform of the Cooper Institute, a vast sea of eager upturned faces greeted him, full of intense curiosity to see what this rude child of the people was like. He was equal to the occasion. When he spoke he was transformed; his eye kindled, his voice rang, his face shone and seemed to light up the whole assembly. For an hour and a half he held his audience in the hollow of his hand. His style of speech and manner of delivery were severely simple. What Lowell called "The grand simplicities of the Bible," with which he was so familiar, were reflected in his discourse. With no attempt at ornament or rhetoric, without parade or pretence, he spoke straight to the point. If any came expecting the turgid eloquence or the ribaldry of the frontier, they must have been startled at the earnest and sincere purity of his utterances. It was marvellous to see how this untutored man, by mere self discipline and the chastening of his own spirit, had outgrown all meretricious arts, and found his own way to the grandeur and strength of absolute simplicity.

He spoke upon the theme which he had mastered so thoroughly. He demonstrated by copious historical proofs and masterly logic that the fathers who created the Constitution in order to form a more perfect union, to establish justice, and to secure the blessings of liberty to themselves and their posterity, intended to empower the Federal Government to exclude slavery from the territories. In the kindliest spirit he protested against the avowed threat of the Southern States to destroy the Union if, in order to secure freedom in those vast regions out of which future States were to be carved, a Republican President were elected. He closed with an appeal to his audience, spoken with all the fire of his aroused and kindling conscience, with a full outpouring

of his love of justice and liberty, to maintain their political purpose on that lofty and unassailable issue of right and wrong which alone could justify it, and not to be intimidated from their high resolve and sacred duty by any threats of destruction to the government or of ruin to themselves. He concluded with this telling sentence, which drove the whole argument home to all our hearts: "Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it." That night the great hall, and the next day the whole city, rang with delighted applause and congratulations, and he who had come as a stranger departed with the laurels of a great triumph.

Alas! in five years from that exulting night I saw him again, for the last time, in the same city, borne in his coffin through its draped streets. With tears and lamentations a heart-broken people accompanied him from Washington, the scene of his martyrdom, to his last resting-place in the young city of the West, where he had worked his way to fame.

Never was a new ruler in a more desperate plight than Lincoln when he entered office on the fourth of March, 1861, four months after his election, and took his oath to support the Constitution and the Union. The intervening time had been busily employed by the Southern States in carrying out their threat of disunion in the event of his election. As soon as the fact was ascertained, seven of them had seceded and had seized upon the forts, arsenals, navy yards, and other public property of the United States within their boundaries, and were making every preparation for war. In the meantime the retiring President, who had been elected by the slave power, and who thought the seceding States could not lawfully be coerced, had done absolutely nothing.

Lincoln found himself, by the Constitution, Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, but with only a remnant of either at hand. Each was to be created on a great scale out of the unknown resources of a nation untried in war.

In his mild and conciliatory inaugural address, while appealing to the seceding States to return to their allegiance, he avowed his purpose to keep the solemn oath he had taken that day, to see that the laws of the Union were faithfully executed, and to use the troops to recover the forts, navy yards, and other property belonging to the government. It is probable, however, that neither side actually realized that war was inevitable, and that the other was determined to fight, until the assault on Fort Sumter presented the South as the first aggressor and roused the North to use every possible resource to maintain the government and the imperilled Union, and to vindicate the supremacy of the flag over every inch of the territory of the United States. The fact that Lincoln's first proclamation called for only 75,000 troops, to serve for three months, shows how inadequate was even his idea of what the future had in store. But from that moment Lincoln and his loyal supporters never faltered in their purpose. They knew they could win, that it was their duty to win, and that for America the whole hope of the future depended upon their winning, for now by the acts of the seceding States the issue of the election — to secure or prevent the extension of slavery — stood transformed into a struggle to preserve or to destroy the Union.

We cannot follow this contest. You know its gigantic proportions; that it lasted four years instead of three months; that in its progress, instead of 75,000 men, more than 2,000,000 were enrolled on the side of the govern-

ment alone; that the aggregate cost and loss to the nation approximated to 1,000,000,000 pounds sterling, and that not less than 300,000 brave and precious lives were sacrificed on each side. History has recorded how Lincoln bore himself during these four frightful years; that he was the real President, the responsible and actual head of the government, through it all; that he listened to all advice, heard all parties, and then, always realizing his responsibility to God and the nation, decided every great executive question for himself. His absolute honesty had become proverbial long before he was President. "Honest Abe Lincoln" was the name by which he had been known for years. His every act attested it.

In all the grandeur of the vast power that he wielded, he never ceased to be one of the plain people, as he always called them, never lost or impaired his perfect sympathy with them, was always in perfect touch with them and open to their appeals; and here lay the very secret of his personality and of his power, for the people in turn gave him their absolute confidence. His courage, his fortitude, his patience, his hopefulness, were sorely tried but never exhausted.

He was true as steel to his generals, but had frequent occasion to change them, as he found them inadequate. This serious and painful duty rested wholly upon him, and was perhaps his most important function as Commander-in-Chief; but when, at last, he recognized in General Grant the master of the situation, the man who could and would bring the war to a triumphant end, he gave it all over to him and upheld him with all his might. Amid all the pressure and distress that the burdens of office brought upon him, his unfailing sense of humor saved him; probably it made it possible for him to live under the burden. He had always been the

great story-teller of the West, and he used and cultivated this faculty to relieve the weight of the load he bore.

It enabled him to keep the wonderful record of never having lost his temper, no matter what agony he had to bear. A whole night might be spent in recounting the stories of his wit, humor, and harmless sarcasm. But I will recall only two of his sayings, both about General Grant, who always found plenty of enemies and critics to urge the President to oust him from his command. One, I am sure, will interest all Scotchmen. They repeated with malicious intent the gossip that Grant drank. "What does he drink?" asked Lincoln. "Whiskey," was, of course, the answer; doubtless you can guess the brand. "Well," said the President, "just find out what particular kind he uses and I'll send a barrel to each of my other generals." The other must be as pleasing to the British as to the American ear. When pressed again on other grounds to get rid of Grant, he declared, "I can't spare that man, he fights!"

He was tender-hearted to a fault, and never could resist the appeals of wives and mothers of soldiers who had got into trouble, and were under sentence of death for their offences. His Secretary of War and other officials complained that they never could get deserters shot. As surely as the women of the culprit's family could get at him he always gave way. Certainly you will all appreciate his exquisite sympathy with the suffering relatives of those who had fallen in battle. His heart bled with theirs. Never was there a more gentle and tender utterance than his letter to a mother who had given all her sons to her country, written at a time when the angel of death had visited almost every household in the land, and was already hovering over him.

"I have been shown," he says, "in the files of the War Department a statement that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from your grief for a loss so overwhelming — but I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation which may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and the lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom."

Hardly could your illustrious sovereign, from the depths of her queenly and womanly heart, have spoken words more touching and tender to soothe the stricken mothers of her own soldiers.

The Emancipation Proclamation, with which Mr. Lincoln delighted the country and the world on the first of January, 1863, will doubtless secure for him a foremost place in history among the philanthropists and benefactors of the race, as it rescued, from hopeless and degrading slavery, so many millions of his fellow beings described in the law and existing in fact as "chattels-personal, in the hands of their owners and possessors, to all intents, constructions, and purposes whatsoever." Rarely does the happy fortune come to one man to render such a service to his kind — to proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.

Ideas rule the world, and never was there a more signal instance of this triumph of an idea than here. William Lloyd Garrison, who thirty years before had begun his crusade for the abolition of slavery, and had lived to see this glorious and unexpected consummation of the

hopeless cause to which he had devoted his life, well described the proclamation as a "great historic event, sublime in its magnitude, momentous and beneficent in its far-reaching consequences, and eminently just and right alike to the oppressor and the oppressed."

Lincoln had always been heart and soul opposed to slavery. Tradition says that on the trip on the flat-boat to New Orleans he formed his first and last opinion of slavery at the sight of negroes chained and scourged, and that then and there the iron entered into his soul. No boy could grow to manhood in those days as a poor white in Kentucky and Indiana, in close contact with slavery or in its neighborhood, without a growing consciousness of its blighting effects on free labor, as well of its frightful injustice and cruelty. In the Legislature of Illinois, where the public sentiment was all for upholding the institution and violently against every movement for its abolition or restriction, upon the passage of resolutions to that effect he had the courage with one companion to put on record his protest, "believing that the institution of slavery is founded both in injustice and bad policy." No great demonstration of courage, you will say; but that was at a time when Garrison, for his abolition utterances, had been dragged by an angry mob through the streets of Boston with a rope around his body, and in the very year that Lovejoy in the same State of Illinois was slain by rioters while defending his press, from which he had printed anti-slavery appeals.

In Congress he brought in a bill for gradual abolition in the District of Columbia, with compensation to the owners, — for until they raised treasonable hands against the life of the nation he always maintained that the property of the slave-holders, into which they had come by two centuries of descent, without fault on their part,

ought not to be taken away from them without just compensation He used to say that, one way or another, he had voted forty-two times for the Wilmot proviso, which Mr. Wilmot of Pennsylvania moved as an addition to every bill which affected United States territory, — "That neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in any part of the said territory," — and it is evident that his condemnation of the system, on moral grounds as a crime against the human race, and on political grounds as a cancer that was sapping the vitals of the nation, and must master its whole being or be itself extirpated, grew steadily upon him until it culminated in his great speeches in the Illinois debate.

By the mere election of Lincoln to the Presidency, the further extension of slavery into the territories was rendered forever impossible — *Vox populi, vox Dei.* Revolutions never go backward, and when founded on a great moral sentiment stirring the heart of an indignant people their edicts are irresistible and final. Had the slave power acquiesced in that election, had the Southern States remained under the Constitution and within the Union, and relied upon their constitutional and legal rights, their favorite institution, immoral as it was, blighting and fatal as it was, might have endured for another century. The great party that had elected him, unalterably determined against its extension, was nevertheless pledged not to interfere with its continuance in the States where it already existed. Of course, when new regions were forever closed against it, from its very nature it must have begun to shrink and to dwindle; and probably gradual and compensated emancipation, which appealed very strongly to the new President's sense of justice and expediency, would, in the progress of time, by a reversion to the ideas of the founders of the Re-

public, have found a safe outlet for both masters and slaves. But whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad, and when seven States, afterwards increased to eleven, openly seceded from the Union, when they declared and began the war upon the nation, and challenged its mighty power to the desperate and protracted struggle for its life, and for the maintenance of its authority as a nation over its territory, they gave to Lincoln and to freedom the sublime opportunity of history.

In his first inaugural address, when as yet not a drop of precious blood had been shed, while he held out to them the olive branch in one hand, in the other he presented the guarantees of the Constitution, and after reciting the emphatic resolution of the Convention that nominated him, that the maintenance inviolate of the "rights of the States, and especially the right of each State to order and control its own domestic institutions according to its own judgment exclusively, is essential to that balance of power on which the perfection and endurance of our political fabric depend," he reiterated this sentiment, and declared, with no mental reservation, "that all the protection which, consistently with the Constitution and the laws, can be given, will be cheerfully given to all the States when lawfully demanded for whatever cause — as cheerfully to one section as to another."

When, however, these magnanimous overtures for peace and reunion were rejected; when the seceding States defied the Constitution and every clause and principle of it; when they persisted in staying out of the Union from which they had seceded, and proceeded to carve out of its territory a new and hostile empire based on slavery; when they flew at the throat of the nation

and plunged it into the bloodiest war of the nineteenth century — the tables were turned, and the belief gradually came to the mind of the President that if the Rebellion was not soon subdued by force of arms, if the war must be fought out to the bitter end, then to reach that end the salvation of the nation itself might require the destruction of slavery wherever it existed; that if the war was to continue on one side for Disunion, for no other purpose than to preserve slavery, it must continue on the other side for the Union, to destroy slavery.

As he said, "Events control me; I cannot control events," and as the dreadful war progressed and became more deadly and dangerous, the unalterable conviction was forced upon him that, in order that the frightful sacrifice of life and treasure on both sides might not be all in vain, it had become his duty as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, as a necessary war measure, to strike a blow at the Rebellion which, all others failing, would inevitably lead to its annihilation, by annihilating the very thing for which it was contending. His own words are the best:

"I understood that my oath to preserve the Constitution to the best of my ability imposed upon me the duty of preserving by every indispensable means that government — that nation — of which that Constitution was the organic law. Was it possible to lose the nation and yet preserve the Constitution? By general law, life and limb must be protected; yet often a limb must be amputated to save a life; but a life is never wisely given to save a limb. I felt that measures otherwise unconstitutional might become lawful by becoming indispensable to the preservation of the Constitution through the preservation of the nation. Right or wrong, I assumed this ground and now avow it. I could not feel that, to the

best of my ability, I had ever tried to preserve the Constitution if to save slavery or any minor matter I should permit the wreck of government, country, and Constitution all together."

And so, at last, when in his judgment the indispensable necessity had come, he struck the fatal blow, and signed the proclamation which has made his name immortal. By it, the President, as Commander-in-Chief in time of actual armed rebellion, and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing the rebellion, proclaimed all persons held as slaves in the States and parts of States then in rebellion to be thenceforward free, and declared that the executive, with the army and navy, would recognize and maintain their freedom.

In the other great steps of the government, which led to the triumphant prosecution of the war, he necessarily shared the responsibility and the credit with the great statesmen who stayed up his hands in his Cabinet, — with Seward, Chase and Stanton, and the rest, and with his generals and admirals, his soldiers and sailors, — but this great act was absolutely his own. The conception and execution were exclusively his. He laid it before his Cabinet as a measure on which his mind was made up and could not be changed, asking them only for suggestions as to details. He chose the time and the circumstances under which the Emancipation should be proclaimed and when it should take effect.

It came not an hour too soon; but public opinion in the North would not have sustained it earlier. In the first eighteen months of the war its ravages had extended from the Atlantic to beyond the Mississippi. Many victories in the West had been balanced and paralyzed by inaction and disasters in Virginia, only partially redeemed by the bloody and indecisive battle of Antietam;

a reaction had set in from the general enthusiasm which had swept the Northern States after the assault upon Sumter. It could not truly be said that they had lost heart, but faction was raising its head. Heard through the land like the blast of a bugle, the proclamation rallied the patriotism of the country to fresh sacrifices and renewed ardor. It was a step that could not be revoked. It relieved the conscience of the nation from an incubus that had oppressed it from its birth. The United States were rescued from the false predicament in which they had been from the beginning, and the great popular heart leaped with new enthusiasm for "Liberty and Union, henceforth and forever, one and inseparable." It brought not only moral but material support to the cause of the government, for within two years 120,000 colored troops were enlisted in the military service and following the national flag, supported by all the loyalty of the North, and led by its choicest spirits. One mother said, when her son was offered the command of the first colored regiment, "If he accepts it I shall be as proud as if I had heard that he was shot." He was shot heading a gallant charge of his regiment. The Confederates replied to a request of his friends for his body that they "had buried him under a layer of his niggers;" but that mother has lived to enjoy thirty-six years of his glory, and Boston has erected its noblest monument to his memory.

The effect of the proclamation upon the actual progress of the war was not immediate, but wherever the Federal armies advanced they carried freedom with them, and when the summer came round the new spirit and force which had animated the heart of the government and people were manifest. In the first week of July the decisive battle of Gettysburg turned the tide

of war, and the fall of Vicksburg made the great river free from its source to the Gulf.

On foreign nations the influence of the proclamation and of these new victories was of great importance. In those days, when there was no cable, it was not easy for foreign observers to appreciate what was really going on; they could not see clearly the true state of affairs, as in the last year of the nineteenth century we have been able, by our new electric vision, to watch every event at the antipodes and observe its effect. The Rebel emissaries, sent over to solicit intervention, spared no pains to impress upon the minds of public and private men and upon the press their own views of the character of the contest. The prospects of the Confederacy were always better abroad than at home. The stock markets of the world gambled upon its chances, and its bonds at one time were high in favor.

Such ideas as these were seriously held: that the North was fighting for empire and the South for independence; that the Southern States, instead of being the grossest oligarchies, essentially despotisms, founded on the right of one man to appropriate the fruit of other men's toil and to exclude them from equal rights, were real republics, feebler to be sure than their Northern rivals, but representing the same idea of freedom, and that the mighty strength of the nation was being put forth to crush them; that Jefferson Davis and the Southern leaders had created a nation; that the republican experiment had failed, and the Union had ceased to exist. But the crowning argument to foreign minds was that it was an utter impossibility for the government to win in the contest; that the success of the Southern States, so far as separation was concerned, was as certain as any event yet future and contingent could be; that the subjugation

of the South by the North, even if it could be accomplished, would prove a calamity to the United States and the world, and especially calamitous to the negro race; and that such a victory would necessarily leave the people of the South for many generations cherishing deadly hostility against the government and the North, and plotting always to recover their independence.

When Lincoln issued his proclamation he knew that all these ideas were founded in error; that the national resources were inexhaustible; that the government could and would win, and that if slavery were once finally disposed of, the only cause of difference being out of the way, the North and South would come together again, and by and by be as good friends as ever. In many quarters abroad the proclamation was welcomed with enthusiasm by the friends of America; but I think the demonstrations in its favor that brought more gladness to Lincoln's heart than any other were the meetings held in the manufacturing centres by the very operatives upon whom the war bore the hardest, expressing the most enthusiastic sympathy with the proclamation, while they bore with heroic fortitude the grievous privations which the war entailed upon them. Mr. Lincoln's expectation when he announced to the world that all slaves in all States then in rebellion were set free must have been that the avowed position of his government, that the continuance of the war now meant the annihilation of slavery, would make intervention impossible for any foreign nation whose people were lovers of liberty — and so the result proved.

The growth and development of Lincoln's mental power and moral force, of his intense and magnetic personality, after the vast responsibilities of government were thrown upon him at the age of fifty-two, furnish a

rare and striking illustration of the marvellous capacity and adaptability of the human intellect — of the sound mind in the sound body. He came to the discharge of the great duties of the Presidency with absolutely no experience in the administration of government, or of the vastly varied and complicated questions of foreign and domestic policy which immediately arose, and continued to press upon him during the rest of his life; but he mastered each as it came, apparently with the facility of a trained and experienced ruler. As Clarendon said of Cromwell, "His parts seemed to be raised by the demands of great station." His life through it all was one of intense labor, anxiety, and distress, without one hour of peaceful repose from first to last. But he rose to every occasion. He led public opinion, but did not march so far in advance of it as to fail of its effective support in every great emergency. He knew the heart and thought of the people, as no man not in constant and absolute sympathy with them could have known it, and so holding their confidence, he triumphed through and with them. Not only was there this steady growth of intellect, but the infinite delicacy of his nature and its capacity for refinement developed also, as exhibited in the purity and perfection of his language and style of speech. The rough backwoodsman, who had never seen the inside of a university, became in the end, by self training and the exercise of his own powers of mind, heart, and soul, a master of style, and some of his utterances will rank with the best, the most perfectly adapted to the occasion which produced them.

Have you time to listen to his two minutes' speech at Gettysburg, at the dedication of the Soldiers' Cemetery? His whole soul was in it:

"Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation conceived in liberty

and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate — we cannot consecrate — we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here — but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve, that these dead shall not have died in vain — that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth."

He lived to see his work indorsed by an overwhelming majority of his countrymen. In his second inaugural address, pronounced just forty days before his death, there is a single passage which well displays his indomitable will and at the same time his deep religious feeling, his sublime charity to the enemies of his country, and his broad and catholic humanity :

"If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offences which in the Providence of God must needs come, but which having continued through the appointed

time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsmen's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid with another drawn by the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'

"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right — let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan — to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations."

His prayer was answered. The forty days of life that remained to him were crowned with great historic events. He lived to see his Proclamation of Emancipation embodied in an amendment of the Constitution, adopted by Congress, and submitted to the States for ratification. The mighty scourge of war did speedily pass away, for it was given him to witness the surrender of the Rebel army and the fall of their capital, and the starry flag that he loved waving in triumph over the national soil. When he died by the madman's hand in the supreme hour of victory, the vanquished lost their best friend, and the human race one of its noblest examples; and all the friends of freedom and justice, in whose cause he lived and died, joined hands as mourners at his grave.

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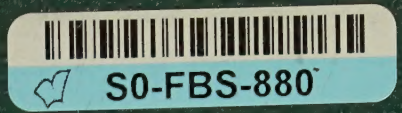
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